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MUSINGS OF BASAVA

A FREE RENDERING

BY

S. S. BASAWANAL, M.A.

AND

K. R. SRINIVASA IYENGAR,
M. A., D. LITT.

VEERASHAIVA SAHITYA BHANDARA
"KALYAN BHAVAN"
CHICKPET BANGALORE 2

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MUSINGS OF BASAVA

— A FREE RENDERING —

WITH A BIOGRAPHICAL AND
CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

BY

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TO

SARDAR RAJA

LAKHAMAGAUDA BASAWAPRABHU

C.I.E., BAR-AT-LAW

SIRDESAI OF VANTMURI

IN ADMIRATION AND ESTEEM

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INTRODUCTION

I

In presenting our 'free rendering' of Basava's *vachanas*, we deem it necessary to give the reader an account of the life and times of Basava, his philosophy and his teachings. A mystic, a religious and social reformer, Basava was also an adept in statecraft; in sum, a unique personality. His followers, the Lingayats, number well over forty lakhs; and they are at present largely concentrated in the southern districts of the Bombay Presidency and the major states of Hyderabad and Mysore. The sweeping social reforms that Basava introduced are largely in evidence even to-day, though several centuries have elapsed since Basava lived and moved and had his being. Further, as one of the pioneers of a novel form of literary expression, viz. *vachana sahitya*, Basava has left an imperishable mark in the history of Kannada literature. Above all, Basava and his followers had to face, and to solve, social and religious problems almost identical in nature with those that are now confronting us and demanding an immediate solution; and a knowledge of the way in which they tried to tackle those problems, and

the success or failure that attended their efforts, will therefore be of immense value to our own generation in the throes of a cultural rebirth.

A brief description of the political and social conditions of the times in which Basava lived should naturally precede any sketch, however short, of Basava's life, for it will better enable us to understand the significance of his life and mission. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries of the Christian Era, there were many ruling dynasties in the various parts of Karnatak. Of these the most outstanding were the Chalukyas of Kalyan and the Hoysalas of Dorasamudram. It is a matter for pride that Karnatak has fairly maintained a creditable tradition of religious toleration so that instances of persecution on the part of the rulers of the Province are comparatively few and far between. Different communities were encouraged to live in amity side by side by the Karnatak kings of old whatever faiths they themselves professed. Hinduism and Jainism flourished one alongside of the other in ancient Karnatak. Among the Hindus, again, both the important sects of Saivism and Vaishnavism claimed their own innumerable adherents. Perhaps, as a result of the Muslim conquest of Northern India, particularly of Kashmir, in the earlier centuries, numerous North Indian Saivites, belonging especially to

the Kashmir school of Saivism, migrated to these parts, and busied themselves with the spread of their own tenets. There were consequently two main divisions of Saivism, each with a number of sub-divisions of its own. The first concerned itself with the philosophical aspects of Saivism, while the other cult emphasized on the mystic and ritualistic aspects. Among the sub-divisions of the latter, the Kapalika cult deserves special mention. These latter cults one and all preached the worship of God Siva in his terrible aspects, and this again led this particular brand of Saivites to practice mystic and symbolic rituals, some awful, some revolting, all equally reprehensible from the purely rationalistic point of view.

In the meantime Vaishnavism also received a fresh impetus in Karnatak owing to the conversion of Bittideva (or Vishnu Vardhana) of Hoysala dynasty to that faith by the great South Indian religious teacher, Ramanujacharya, who, according to tradition, had found refuge in the Hoysala court from the persecution launched against the Vaishnavites by the Saiva ruler, Kulottunga Chola. Philosophical ideas drawn from the teachings of this Acharya about the nature of the soul and its relation to God began to influence various other sects, thus pro-

voking endless discussions and forging new syntheses in the field of religion and philosophy.

In the latter half of the twelfth century, Bijjala of the Kalachurya family, a feudatory chief of the Chalukyas of Kalyan, usurped their kingdom and set up his own rule. The political situation was dim and alarmingly uncertain. Karnatak was then all but a spiritual waste land pathetically waiting for the life-giving rains of authentic faith. It was at this juncture that Basava made his appearance in the chequered history of Karnatak.

II

Although there is plentiful material regarding the life of Basava available in the more or less shapelessly protoplasmic form of Puranas and Charitras, written both by Virasaiva and Jain authors, it is a deplorable fact that these writers frantically lacked a sense of proportion and even more a sense of historical accuracy. They drew freely upon their fertile imagination and wove a tantalizingly shot-silk texture of fact and fancy. Even after making due allowance for the inevitable predilections of the Virasaiva authors and the no less inevitable prejudices of Jain historians, we cannot always arrive at the truth concerning even the major events in Basava's life. The passage of time has also played its own

part in further complicating matters by giving rise to all sorts of legends relating to Basava's superhuman origins and qualities. In the following paragraphs we have endeavoured to eschew all that savours of the legendary and the miraculous, and to refer only to those events in Basava's life that throw light on his character and achievements.

Basava was born in a high-placed and well-connected Brahmin family about 1125 A.D. in a place called Ingaleswar-Bagewadi (now in Bijapur district). Much ink has spilt in an attempt to fix the actual denomination among the Brahmins to which he belonged. Be that as it may, young Basava was a precocious child and was given to religious musings. The first crisis in his life occurred when he was eight years old. Preparations were undertaken by his parents for his *upanayanam* or initiation ceremony and to invest him with the "sacred thread". All their kith and kin had gathered to witness the ceremony, among the guests being Basava's maternal uncle, Baladeva, Prime Minister to King Bijjala. The stage was set for the initiation when Basava sprang a surprise on the bewildered assembly of priests and elders by flatly refusing to undergo the ceremony. He made it clear to all present that he had already been initiated by the grace of God into the only

true faith, viz. Virasaivism; and that, consequently, he had discarded the old faith. As Basava refused to be moved by the arguments advanced by his elders, the ceremony had ultimately to be abandoned. Presently, Basava began to profess his new beliefs openly and, unwilling to embarrass his parents, left his home for good. Meanwhile Baladeva, who was much impressed by his nephew's piety and devotion, gave his daughter Gangambika in marriage to Basava. Accompanied by his wife and his sister, Basava took up his residence in the vicinity of the temple of God Kudala Sangameswar and received religious instruction from a learned ascetic of the place.

In course of time Basava's uncle and father-in-law, Baladeva, died, and the office of Chief Minister in King Bijjala's court fell vacant. Bijjala, on the advice of his courtiers, offered the responsible post to Basava. It appears Basava hesitated a good deal; when at last Bijjala gave the assurance that he would not interfere with Basava's administration, he accepted the offer and he was installed Prime Minister, sole Lord of the Treasury, and Commander-in-chief. Basava married a second time according to one tradition, this wife being the adopted sister of Bijjala himself.

Basava's official position coupled with his

charity, piety and learning made his new creed very popular. Men and women from all parts of the country, including princes and chiefs from remote provinces, flocked to Kalyan, and enrolled themselves as adherents of this new faith. The order of priests known as *jangamas* was reorganized, and extensive conversion to the new faith through them was undertaken. Thus the number of Virasaiva converts, drawn from almost every caste, began to swell day by day.

Bijjala, being a follower of Jina, naturally enough viewed with suspicion and increasing alarm the rapid growth of the new creed. Scandal-mongers were not slow to make capital out of the king's prejudice and assiduously poured poison into his ears against Basava. Bijjala made some attempts to cripple Basava's all-embracing powers, and even to put him in prison. But Basava's hypnotic hold on the people and his undoubted prowess and integrity compelled Bijjala, much against his will, to put up with Basava and his actions. Meanwhile the gulf between them perceptibly widened day after day. Finally Bijjala was prevailed upon by the enemies of Basava to make use of his special reserve powers to annihilate the Virasaiva movement. Circumstances also favoured Bijjala and brought matters to a head. A marriage was about this time solemnized between the daughter

of a Brahmin convert, Madhuvayya, and the son of an "untouchable" convert, Haralayya. Orthodoxy fretted and fumed and raved at this "unholy" alliance; Bijjala thought it an excellent opportunity for taking severe measures against the Virasaiva movement and its chief exponent. Accordingly, the two "devotees" who had married were ordered to be dragged over the ground at the end of a rope.

This action of Bijjala's, instead of striking terror into the hearts of the Virasaivas, only infuriated them; they lost their normal balance, and now visibly thirsted for revenge. Basava was sorely grieved at the unsavoury turn events were taking and tried to stem the tide of violence on both sides. Was his movement, so conscientiously based on the eternal verities of peace and non-violence, to end now in an orgy of unreason and bloodshed? On the other hand, Bijjala was now completely alienated from him; through the ordinary channels of the king's prerogative, therefore, no solution could be sought. Nor was there any prospect of Basava's own followers listening to his sweet reasonableness; Basava therefore realized that his own days were now numbered. Overwhelmed by a sense of failure, Basava sought refuge in his titulary deity, Lord Kudala Sangama, and became one with him.

Freed from the restraining influence of Basava, two fire-eating Virasaivas, Jagadeva and Bommarasa, killed Bijjala in his palace and proclaimed their deed to the outside world together with the reasons that had prompted them to it; and it is said that Jagadeva also killed himself soon after. Confusion reigned supreme in the town; insurrection and street fights were very common occurrences; and under cover of darkness many prominent Virasaivas left Kalyan. They were pursued some distance by the army of Bijjala's son, Raya Murari Sovideva; but they succeeded in evading it. We need not follow their fortunes any further.

III

Basava's teachings have largely come to us in the form of *vachanas*; but in his own time the main instrument of forging and propagating his gospel was the *anubhava mantapa*, something analogous to an academy of religion or a modern assemblage of Cardinals. The leaders of the Virasaiva movement presumably took part in the *anubhava mantapa* discussions on theological and philosophical problems. Basava and Allama Prabhu and Chennabasava were among the many who participated in those learned debates and helped to crystallize the

several views and ways of living yet prevalent among the Virasaivas of to-day.

It is beyond the scope of this Introduction to give any detailed exposition of Basava's teachings. To Basava and his followers God is one and all-pervading. In this and in other matters, Basava and the other exponents of Virasaivism seem to derive somewhat from ancient Saivism and Tamil Saiva Siddhanta, but also to strike a distinctive path of their own, partially resembling Ramanuja's *visishtadvaita* as well. God is one and all-pervading; but how about the human soul? Is it identical with God, with the Absolute of Sankara? Is it rather ever intrinsically different from God? Virasaivism would adopt an attitude of gradualism in the increasing awareness of (and ultimate identity with) God on the soul's part. The identity comes in the end; meanwhile there are stages through which the individual soul must pass before it can become one, absolutely one, with the ordainer of all order and the mystical mathematics of the City of Heaven. Virasaivism posits six such stages—*bhakta, mahesa, prasadi, pranalingi, sarana*, and *aikya*, these achieving the final union with God. Basava's *vachanas* themselves are traditionally arranged under these six *sthalas* or stages and they are consequently a recordation of the vibrations of his soul as it

traversed the entire gamut from a pathetic sense of separation to the conviction of the fact of identity. As the soul progresses from a feeling of helplessness and frustration to the ineffable jubilation of identity, it constantly gains momentum by exploiting certain aids, viz. the *ashtavaranam*; these are: obedience to a qualified *guru* or teacher, worship of the *linga*, reverence for the *jangama*, the wearing of *rudraksha*, the use of *vibhuti*, the participation of the *guru's prasada*, purification through the holy *thirtha* (water) with which the *guru's* feet have been washed, and the meditative utterance of the *panchakshara*. Many of these "aids to faith" are in evidence *mutatis mutandis* in the daily lives of the Vaishnavite followers of Ramanuja as well. The final union itself is described by Virasaiva pundits as *bayala nirbayala*, in other words, a condition of existence which is no existence,—a concept rather approximating to the *nirvana* of Buddhism. But unlike Buddhism, Virasaivism is inveterately theistic.

To purify religion Basava felt compelled to discourage the cruder forms of idolatry and temple worship, and also to free his followers from the tutelage of traditional priests who were, in his time, apparently in the habit of observing the outward forms of sanctity while shamelessly

denying the meaning inherent in them. On the other hand, the *linga* worn always on the body became symbolic of the presence of God; the body became God's own home, and hence itself became sacred. Thus Virasaivism does not countenance the wilder aberrations of the mortification of the human body. In fact Basava's insistence on the adequacy of the human body to serve as God's home comes like a breath of spring breeze after the aridity of meaningless penances that elsewhere we have come across. Hence the following *vachana* acquires special significance to a student of Virasaivism :

There be some that are rich;
  they may build temples to you
  (or they may not)—
  stony, mortal edifices !
I am not rich—poor me !
And yet, be my legs the pillars,
  my body the shrine,
  my head the golden pinnacle;
thus will I decree
your imperishable home,
  O Lord, Kudala Sangama !

This is not merely an extremely pretty poetic image; it runs rather to the very core of Virasaivism.

Again, though Basava warned his followers against being made dupes of the sorry kind of

priests flourishing all over the world now as always, he did assign a place (and a very important place) in his scheme of religion for the authentic *guru*. As among the South Indian Vaishnavite Brahmins, a Virasaiva *guru* need not necessarily be a monk but may be a householder with a wife and children. These *gurus* are in a special position, on account of their own spiritual advancement, to guide the beginner in the five *acharas*, viz. *sadachara*, *lingachara*, *niyatachara*, *ganachara* and *bhrityachara*; the general aim of these *acharas* or "ways of right living" is obviously to spur the Virasaiva to be ever useful to God and man. The devotee in time is steeped in the idea of holiness and learns to live rightly and purely in thought, word and deed. Meanwhile, the devotee does not necessarily abstract himself from the hurly-burly of the world; he does not even, with the wry face of some types of ascetics, eschew worldly enjoyment. But he takes care to be in the world, not to be a slave of it; and while he enjoys the varied blessings of worldly life, he does so in no mood of vanity or pride, but ever humbly and unselfishly.

Virasaivism was a healthy growth on the soil of Hinduism because it attempted many useful reforms. Neither sex, nor social status, nor caste disqualifies a person from attaining salvation;

and hence, in the eyes of a Virasaiva, the "untouchable" and the " weaker sex" are potentially the religious and social equals of the members of the highest castes. This means not merely a welcome levelling of the castes (and hence eradication of untouchability) but also a discountenancing of the five pollutions yet observed by other Hindus. The Virasaivas do not attach any importance to the "pollutions" on account of births, deaths, women's monthly courses, etc. So long as the *linga* is worn on the body, like a fire it burns away all impurities. Further, from the social point of view it is worthy of note that Basava discouraged mere vagrancy and beggary as a means of living, and extolled the simple dignity of labour.

Basava's Virasaivism, then, has for its background the traditional Saivism of the North; but it has also intimate affiliations with the Saiva Siddhanta in vogue in Tamil Nad. It was a radical movement for the reform of some of the abuses and empty forms of the time; and it also gave to Saivism that colouring of the ideas of devotion and self-surrender that Ramanuja had given to traditional Vaishnavism. Above all, Basava did not work in the vacuum of the traditional cell but in the very rush and tumult of an active and many-sided life. He left his mark as a religious reformer, as a man of letters,

and, above all, as a wise and progressive leader who taught men the art of right living.

IV

We shall now refer to Basava's mysticism as revealed in his *vachanas*. Mystics there have been all the world over, and practically at all times. Broadly speaking, western mystics and poets have pursued distinctively separate paths, a few notable exceptions notwithstanding; in the East, however, the Moslem and Hindu mystics alike have fused "poetical and mystical ecstasy into a single flame".[1] This is true of the Sufi mystics in the world of Islam and also of Hindu mystics so varied as the Tamil Saiva Samayacharyas, the Tamil Alwars, the Lingayat saints, and Maharashtrian and North Indian mystics like Tukaram, Kabir, Mira Bai and Chaitanya. But in substance, in their quintessence, the outpourings of eastern mystics and Christian mystics like St. John of the Cross and St. Catherine of Genoa affirm in almost identical language the same eternal truths. The naked eye is ever tantalized and flabbergasted by the seeming chaos around it. There is pain, and misery, and defeat, and cruelty; and Evil itself is attractive like a many-coloured dome. The

[1] Christopher Dawson.

individual feels himself an insignificant speck in the cosmic whirlwind, frustrated at every turn, destroyed at a progressive rate. The whole aim of man's spiritual life is somehow to get over this creeping paralysis of defeat and destruction, and to discover a meaning in this seemingly purposeless life, a unity in this seemingly baffling variety. And hence every mystic has to hold fast to two great spiritual axioms: firstly, that this multifoliate universe, this chaotic congress of a million dichotomies, is none the less a unity, a cosmos self-controlled, ordered and purposive; in other words, that the universe is a macrocosm governed by harmony. The mystic has, secondly, to hold fast to the conviction that the microcosm, man's individual soul, is of the same essence as the macrocosm; and that hence the difference between the microcosm and the macrocosm is certainly no difference in kind; it follows from this that man's individual soul can apprehend the macrocosm and realize its intrinsic identity with it. The mystic, consciously or unconsciously, proceeds on the basis of these two axioms to invade the invisible, and to explore the furthest regions of the spirit. He sometimes kicks his legs in despair, but his inner urge spurs him onwards to hold on to his predetermined course; he receives now and then, and presently more often,

intimations of the immortality and indestructibility of his self, and with greater hope now than formerly he quickens his pace towards his spiritual destination; and at last he apprehends the truth that so far he had only intellectually formulated and perhaps in moments of gloom rationally doubted. But the time for doubt and argument is gone; he *knows*; he has lived the unity, and hence he can now bear witness to it in matchless prose and rhyme.

It is not necessary here to answer the usual rationalistic onslaughts against mysticism. There are the Bright Young Things who say that the mystics are merely mad; fortunately, the vast majority of mankind finds more solace in the ecstasies of the mystics than in the correct enunciations of the rationalists. Nor is it necessary here to attempt any definitive description of mysticism nor to discuss elaborately the implications of the various definitions that have been offered by the philosophical pundits. Nor yet is it within the scope of the present Introduction to inquire into the precise relation intuitive activity bears to mysticism. All that is relevant to our present purpose is to realize that, however constituted in its inner fabric, mysticism is in all cases a unique and untranslatable self-experience of the all-embracing ONE in a brief, glorious period of the suspension of all material

faculties. It is the spiritual triumph of

> that blessed mood,
> In which the burthen of the mystery,
> In which the heavy and the weary weight
> Of all this unintelligent world
> Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood,
> In which the affections gently lead us on,
> Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul;[1]

it is the vision that affirms:

> All that is, at all,
> Lasts ever, past recall;
> Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure:
> What entered into thee,
> *That* was, is, and shall be.
> Time's wheel runs back or stops: potter and clay endure;[2]

it is also the trembling ecstasy thus described by Traherne:

> I was entertained like an Angel with the works of God in their splendour and glory. I saw all in the peace of Eden; Heaven and Earth did sing my Creator's praises.... Eternity was manifest in the Light of the Day, and something infinite beyond everything appeared; which talked with my expectation and moved my desire.

This final self-experience and conviction of mysticism cannot *prima facie* refer to any half-

[1] Wordsworth. [2] Robert Browning.

hearted unity. The unity must transcend all possible cleavages, for, as Mr. Middleton Murry remarks, "the One of true Mysticism is not the Good, or the True, or the Beautiful; it is the One. And in the One the Bad, the False and the Ugly exist no less than the Good, the True and the Beautiful. All alike, for true Mysticism, are in some sense appearance." The sense of separateness, difference, and discrimination is a product of *avidya*; and true Mysticism should be able to pierce through the veils of seeming variety and touch the underlying truth, the final identity. And it is this sense of unity, this conviction of harmony, that the mystics of the world hymn in one voice—the voice of jubilation appropriate to the inheritors of immeasurable bliss. And their outpourings therefore become both "Songs of Honour" and incantations allied to prayer.

Indeed, what is so striking about mystical experiences is their agreement in fundamentals; the imagery in which they are usually clothed may seem different but the experiences themselves have an innate kinship and this in itself is a proof of their validity and reality. The mystics are the great explorers into the world of the spirit; and one and all of them give us an almost identical picture of the extra-physical world; one and all of them affirm the fact of

identity persisting through the seeming differences, the grace of harmony disciplining the seeming tunelessness of our doleful cries. The Sufist, Jilji, could asseverate :

> I am the existent and the non-existent, and the naughted and the everlasting.
>
> I am the avowed and the imagined and the snake and the charmer.
>
> I am the loosed and the bound, and the wine and the cup-bearer.
>
> I am the treasure, I am poverty, I am my creatures and my Creator.[1]

And another Sufist, Baba Kuhi, affirms no less emphatically :

> Neither soul nor body, accident nor substance,
> Qualities nor causes—only God I saw.
> Like a candle I was melting in His fire
> Amidst the flames outflashing—only God I saw.[2]

Thus St. Catherine of Genoa : "My Me is God, nor do I recognize any other Me except my God himself." And thus again Thayumanavar, the Tamil mystic, hymns in chorus with the rest :

> I cannot worship Thee, O God! in any embodied form, for I see Thyself in the very flowers and seeing Thee there how could I pluck the dew-filled gems; nor can I raise my hands for worshipping Thee. I feel ashamed to do so as Thou art within me all the while.

[1] Professor Nicholson's translation.

[2] Ibid.

Is it surprising, then, that Virasaiva mystics too utter similar strains and equally uncompromisingly bear witness to the never-changing One who holds together the apparent ever-changing many? Thus Allama Prabhu: "You are in fields and in valleys, O Lord; You are in caves and in hills, O Lord; You are wherever our eyes are cast, and we shall neither see the whole nor apprehend thee quite." Basava's accents are the same:

> Wherever I cast my glances,
> I see You there, My Lord;
> the pattern of endless space,
> the light of the cosmic eye,
> and the universe's living voice—
> You are these and all,
> O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

And so are Sister Mahadevi's:

> The groves and the trees therein,
> the branches and the foliage
> and the creatures gambolling about,
> You are these all in all,
> You are one and all,
> O my Chennamallikarjuna!

Such affirmations can be multiplied from the mystical literature of all countries, and they all have such close identity in cast and subject-matter that they ought to be accepted as providing us with what may be called an experimental verification of the nature of ultimate reality. Of

course, it is not every one of us that can hope to transmute our intellectual faculties into mystic apprehensions of the soul or intuitions of the self. The mystic's experiences, though lived in this very world, are of a nature very foreign to its general currency. In the words of Evelyn Underhill: "It belongs to another plane of being, moves securely upon levels unrelated to our speech; and hence eludes the measuring powers of humanity. We, from the valley, can only catch a glimpse of the true life of these elect spirits, transfigured upon the mountain. They are far away, breathing another air; we cannot reach them. Yet it is impossible to overestimate their importance for the race. They are our ambassadors to the Absolute."

V

It is clear from the foregoing that since ultimate Reality is one and not many, true mystical experiences are in essence identical. But the very intensity and ineffability of their otherworldliness strain the limits of the wordable; and hence the mystics, unable to describe their experiences in lucid clarity, are obliged to resort to images. Words become symbolic; and while interpreting these symbols we begin to wrangle. "Intuitions abide, while interpretations change. *Sruti* and *smriti* differ as the authority

of fact and the authority of interpretation."[1] If like Mr. Edward Watkin we distinguish between the primary and directly internal interpretations of mystical experiences and the secondary interpretations that relate them to a total world view, we find, surprisingly enough, of all religious experience that "with one voice in every place and in every epoch it proclaims the Being, Presence and Operation of God". Philosophical systems may differ, but they are merely the secondary interpretations of mystical experiences; and despite these interpretative differentiations, the truths apprehended by mysticism are in their very nature final.

The destination reached by the mystics is, as we saw, the same whether the devotee is a St. Teresa or an Al Hallaz or a Basava or an Appar or a Tukaram. Nay more. They seem, too, to have followed more or less the same path in their pilgrimage; to have met the same impediments and inns of tranquillity on the way; to have braved the same perils and pitfalls and overcome them; in other words, to have reached their destination at the summit of the mountain-crags only through successive and perceptible stages. The Virasaiva mystics refer, as we have seen, to six stages in their pilgrimage; and they are distantly paralleled by the five "phases of

[1] S. Radhakrishnan.

the mystical life" described by Evelyn Underhill as a generalization of western and eastern mysticism. The dynamics of mysticism, apparently, are the same the world over.

Early during his spiritual pilgrimage, the mystic is aware of the need for establishing contact with ultimate Reality but at the same time he realizes his present unworthiness to achieve his aim. This mood is expressed thus by Basava :

I cry, my Lord,
I wail, I scream,
my Lord;
I ceaselessly call on you,
my Lord.
Vouchsafe me a word,
my Lord;
I implore you,
answer me my prayers,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama !

This is the piercing cry of one whose spiritual awareness has been just aroused and quickened, but who is yet far from his goal. The Tamil mystic, Manickavachakar, speaks in nearly the same terms : "My Father, I am weary ; I shall tarry here no longer. You gave me this life, and you may take it back. I long only to see the radiance of your visage and the honey sweetness of your smile." The tenor of the sixth Psalm is also the same :

Have mercy upon me, O Lord; for I am weak;
O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed.
My soul is also sore vexed:
But thou, O Lord, how long?
Return, O Lord, deliver my soul:
O save me for thy mercies' sake.

Subsequently, the mystic tries to abide by the stern discipline of the self. Occasionally his mind wavers; and this again is followed by regrets and expostulations and self-lacerations. There are checks and counter-checks, but the mystic is definitely forging ahead. As Evelyn Underhill points out, "the typical mystic seems to move towards his goal through a series of strongly marked oscillations between 'states of pleasure' and 'states of pain'." At one stage the mystic is indignant with the serpentine coils of cold reason: thus Basava—

Oh the mind—mine intelligence!
It's the full-grown serpent
in a charmer's grip,
or swaying and dancing to his tune,
his obedient slave . . .

The monkey climbs the tree
and restless flits
from branch to branch;
and so my scaling mind
pursues an uncertain course . . .

The spirit is ever willing, but the flesh proves weak again and again. As Appar, the Tamil

mystic, moans: "When I try to escape from the allurements of the fair sex to dedicate myself to the service of God, my fickle mind binds me to the earth-crust to grovel in the old grooves like a plough that runs along an old furrow." Basava too confesses in anguish:

> The rope of desire doth hold me in leash
> within the ambit of sin;
> I lay waste my powers, my time—
> and I meditate not on Thee!

The mystic presently looks about himself and is aghast at the instances of religious hypocrisy. Basava and Appar rail at this species of self-deception using identical images. Thus avers Basava:

> When you bathe, friends,
> in the flowing stream,
> do you lave yourselves of dirt?
> —the greed for another's pelf
> and the sin of carnal desire?
> If my friends but bathe,
> not wash out these sins,
> this clinging dirt,
> in vain has the river flown,
> O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

And thus Appar: "What if we bathe in the Ganges or the Cauvery? What if we bathe in the cool waters of Comorin or in the swelling seas? Futile is all this if we do not realize the omnipresent God and live accordingly." There

are, similarly, complaints against priesthood that "creeps and intrudes and climbs unto the fold" and exhortations against the crudity of idolatry. But all the while, whether the mystic is engaged in exhortation or denunciation, in contemplation or a career of unselfish service, he is surely marching ahead. He even triumphantly goes through the ordeal of "the dark night of the soul"; even in life's darkest extremity, the faith of a Job, a Harischandra, a Basava, is not shaken; on the contrary, the faith of the mystic is purified by the fiery ordeal and it shines with the radiance of spiritual fulfilment. Doubts have no part or lot in his life now; he is happy in his faith, and he is willing, and he is eager, to share his happiness with others. He can now sing with quiet confidence of the efficacy of God's grace; he has received it himself, and he would now tune his words in prayerful ecstasy:

> Your grace can stir dry roots
> with the freshness of spring;
> from your grace can the sterile cow derive
> abundant milk;
> poison itself can your grace transform
> into holy nectar.
> Your grace is the source of all good,
> O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

Many writers on mysticism have pointed out

that whereas western mystics are mostly men of action as well, eastern mystics are usually divorced from the hurry and strife of everyday life. Delacroix says that "the Christian mystics move from the Infinite to the Definite; they aspire to infinitize life and to define Infinity". But, according to Underhill, "the Oriental mystic 'presses on to lose his life upon the heights'; but he does not come back and bring to his fellow-men the life-giving news that he has transcended mortality in the interests of the race". This may be true of some Oriental mystics, but certainly not of all; Basava, for instance, was an active statesman, organizer and propagandist; so were several other Vaishnavite and Saivite reformers in India. They were throughout "true to the kindred points of Heaven and home".

VI

Basava is without doubt the most outstanding Virasaiva mystic. But even his outpourings lack the sheer lyrical fervour of those of Sister Mahadevi, a contemporary of Basava, and one of the great women mystics of the world. She thus belongs to that group of women, which includes St. Catherine of Genoa, St. Teresa, Mira Bai, Sri Andal, and Rabi'a, who had all

through their lives consecrated themselves to the service of God. Mahadevi was born in a Virasaiva family but she agreed to marry the Jain King, Kausika, on condition he would promise not to interfere with her faith. Presently, misunderstandings inevitably arose, culminating in her separation from her husband. She gave up all her belongings, including her clothes, and covering herself only with her abundant tresses, she proceeded to the court of Basava, and was initiated into the ultimate secret of Reality by Allama Prabhu. She then went to the plantain grove at Sri Saila and spent her last days there. These few details of Sister Mahadevi's life are given in a poetical work of the thirteenth century by the Kannada poet, Harihara; this work itself was only recently discovered and created a sensation in literary circles then. Sister Mahadevi addressed her *vachanas* to the deity of Sri Saila under the name of Chennamallikarjuna.

Like Basava and Sister Mahadevi, many other Virasaiva writers also have exploited the *vachana* form of literature. In consequence, *vachana sahitya* has become something unique in Kannada literature. "Vachana" literally means a sentence or a saying; and in collections of such "sentences" Kannada writers and speculative thinkers have tried to give expression

in simple, familiar and graceful language to their thoughts on Man, the Universe and God, and their inter-relations. Detached observations as the *vachanas* appear to be at first, there is nevertheless an underlying intensity of purpose that makes *vachana* sequences at once composite works of art and lessons in moral deportment. Though the *vachanas* are all written in prose, their verbal suppleness gives them a quiet, inimitable cadence; and in fact many *vachanas* have actually been set to music.

There is in no other literature a *genre* quite like *vachana sahitya*. The nearest approximations would be the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, the Sayings of Confucius, Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*, and Tagore's *Gitanjali*. But what is an occasional by-product elsewhere is a regular and popular medium of expression for the Kannada Virasaiva writers, especially of the mediæval period. According to tradition there are "twice eighty crores" of *vachanas* in the Virasaiva canon.[1] Alliteration and antithesis are often resorted to by the writers of *vachanas*; in this respect, as in others as well, they remind us of the Hebrew prophets. That the *vachana* is by no means an

[1] Rao Saheb P. G. Halkatti of Bijapur is now publishing many of these *vachanas*.

obsolete literary form even to-day is well demonstrated by Mr. R. R. Diwakar's *Antaratmanige*.

VII

We have made a choice of the most significant of Basava's *vachanas* and rendered them into English in the following pages. Our intention has been to give the reader what is universal in Basava's *vachana* sequence; consequently, we have ignored those *vachanas,* admirable in themselves, that refer to the minutiæ of Virasaiva doctrine or ritual. In rendering the chosen *vachanas* into English, we hesitated between prose and verse. To render the original prose into English verse, rhymed or unrhymed, would have been wrong altogether; on the contrary, to render the cadenced prose of the original into mere prose would be to make our rendering savourless. Hence we have attempted a "free rendering", making it thus reproduce the original fervour as far as possible. Nor have we given a literal translation of the *vachanas*; our aim has rather been to be true to the spirit even if occasionally false to the letter of the original. Hence we have not hesitated here and there to expand and amplify the original to make Basava's meaning clear to modern readers. We

have also, now and again, taken the liberty of using poetically effective expressions by raiding the great English poets themselves.

Some of the *vachanas* in our rendering have already appeared in *The Indian P.E.N.* Some of the paragraphs in the Introduction are also reproduced from our notes in that paper. We should be failing in our duty if we did not express here our gratitude to its editor, Srimati Sophia Wadia, for her sympathetic interest in our work while it was in progress. We should also thank our friends, Dr. S. C. Nandimath, Prof. C. S. Bagi and Mr. V. B. Halbhavi, for making many useful suggestions towards the improvement of our work.

MUSINGS OF BASAVA

MUSINGS OF BASAVA

I cry, my Lord,
I wail, I scream,
my Lord;
I ceaselessly call on you,
my Lord.
Vouchsafe me a word,
my Lord;
I implore you,
answer me my prayers,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

Alas, my Lord,
  why made you me—
  this thing of nought,
  a vain travailer here,
  bereft of grace?
Have you no pity, Lord?
Alas, you have none!
Listen, then, and say,
  were it not better done
  a tree, a plant to create
  than wretched me,
  O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

If I was born,
'twas you, not I, who willed
the where and when;
if I should die,
'tis you, not I, should decide
the where and when;
and if I live,
'tis you, not I, who wills
how long and where.
Say then I'm yours,
entirely yours,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

I neither serve nor rule,
I neither beg nor give;
I'm your instrument,
I merely do thy bidding.
When the servant cannot work,
  the mistress must bestir herself;
you're mistress now
  in your own household,
    O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

The straggling cow
has lost its way
in the jungle's depths,
and wildly cries distraught.
I too shall tireless cry for help
till the life eternal
is granted me,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

I am like unto the forsaken bride :
  she has bathed
  and put on saffron and gold,
  but her husband loves her not ;
I am smeared with ash
  and have counted the beads,
  but my Lord hears me not.
Hear me, save me,
    O Lord, Kudala Sangama !

I am like unto the straggling brute
entangled in the mire;
its wild cries are in vain—
it but sinks deeper
into the mud.
I too am a brute:
I faint, I fail, I die.
You, my Lord,
O Lord of all,
for this my trespass
ere men condemn you,
O lift me from the mire,
and save me,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

In the world's giddy theatre
you've set me down
a puppet.
My mind is sorely surfeited
with the dead sea fruit—
empty ashes all.
Save me from this shame,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

The fire enkindled in the hearth
may be extinguished with the earth :
should the earth itself be ablaze,
what charm can quench its rage away ?
Should the very embankment drain off
the water in its confines,
should even the fence nibble away
the corn stalks within,
should the mother's own milk envenom
the suckling child,—
should thus the Preserver himself
Destroyer turn,
where lies the anchor of my hope,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama !

The oyster-shell awaits
  the pearly drop
  with half-opened mouth :
even so for your grace
  I stand and wait.
You're the home-of-all, womb-of-all,
  my sole refuge,
  my soul's refuge.
Save me,
    O Lord, Kudala Sangama !

Slowly like the phases of the moon
by painful degrees
the light of knowledge grows—
and I seem to apprehend . . .
But no!
The moon in her glory is eclipsed entire—
oblivion covers her!
My little knowledge is now betrayed—
will never illumined be
by divine grace;
it's derailed, destroyed
by the potent earth-crust
that hath me in thrall!
When shall I break through it,
tear myself free,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

'ಸಿರಿಗನ್ನಡ' ಗ್ರಂಥಾಲಯ
ಕನ್ನಡ ವಿಶ್ವವಿದ್ಯಾಲಯ,

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Croaks the frog
  and trips away—
  the reptile creeps behind.
I am unaware
  of my imminent doom.
I give my heart away
  a sordid boon.
Spare me, save me,
    O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

See the fugitive hare
  and the hounds in hot pursuit!
The numerous progeny of Desire
  are after me—
  hell-hounds are they all.
Save me from this rushing fate,
    O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

The condemned lamb is brought
to the sacrificial fire :
it sees the decorative green
and nibbles the leaves in glee.
It is innocent
of its impending doom—
it gloats on its present joy.
Even such are all earthly joys,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama !

The Great Illusion—
it is the mother
  gave birth to me;
it is the baby
  fascinates me;
it is the wife
  implicates me.
The Great Illusion—
in varied ways
it keeps me in thrall.
Shall I never break through
  its maddening spell,
    O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

I weakly propose,
  it firmly disposes;
I act at last,
  it turns to nought.
The Great Illusion—
  it ever torments me,
  defeats me quite;
  and I cry in despair.
The Great Illusion—
  it makes futile
  my half-formed desire
  to know you,
    O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

Gazing at the soaring palmyra tops
with eagerness intense,
I but feel the aches in my bones.
Vaulting ambitions all
higher still and higher
soar me aloft for a time—
then frustrate me entire.
Desires are mere heart-aches,
they must weaken and crush me . . .
unless you help me achieve them,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

When you choose to help me, Sire,
you overwhelm me—
it's the river overflowing its banks,
it's plenty everywhere.
Should you disregard me,
you'll quite undo me—
like the pot broken into pieces
by a stone's chance throw.
That fate be never mine,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

A lesser man than I,
no, there is none;
a greater than your devotees,
no, there is none.
I feel it, I know it;
be witness to these truths,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

Behold the golden pinnacle
on the temple's tower'd height
shine in the azure sky :
even now it glistened in the sun,
so soon befouled by the passing crow.
But yonder leathern sandal is blest
though trodden underneath—
it guards your devotee's foot.
Make me not the giddy cynosure
of envious eyes :
let me be only your servant's slave,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama !

The heights of Brahma-knowledge
I may not scale;
no godly stature
tempts me to aspire.
I desire but to pray
that I may reach in time
the feet of your devotees,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

Were I lame, O Lord,
  my feet will never go astray;
were I blind,
  nothing will envenom my sight;
were I deaf,
  no words will my ears profane.
May I seek, then,
  no other refuge
  than your devotees' feet,
    O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

You, my Lord, created,
not merely me,
me miserable,
but these your devotees as well,
these bringers of grace,
and life's sustainers.
Then dare care,
brave all,
and loudly praise
the Lord, Kudala Sangama!

As the trap is ready set
to catch the rat,
Death's icy hand is raised
to lay me low.
Yet my mind schemes
restless for mischief;
so files itself away
and must soon lie dead.
This life is a rat's alley,
all hurry and strife.
Save me from this crushing life,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

There's a weed lies hidden
in the field of corn :
it hinders all growth.
I am an unweeded garden ;
my vicious self
cabins my soul's expanse.
That I may yet quicken
into new life,
and rise to my full height,
weed out, O weed out this vice,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama !

This many-coloured dome,
  this giddy life,
  enthralls me,
  enslaves me.
When the charmer pricks the snake
  to a fury of dance,
the wretched creature feels
  wretcheder still;
when petty joys are offered
  on the threshold
  of the scaffold,
the little victim
  shrinks and shrinks.
This world is but a scaffold,
  and life a mere fury of dance;
they crush me, kill me,
  enemies all—
Save me,
    O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

These are my virtues,
and vices these, so-called:
but are they self-acquired?
—or am I agent free?
I am mere thistledown
quivering helpless
the while;
it is nought mine
but your doing,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

The monkey climbs the tree
  and restless flits
  from branch to branch;
and so my scaling mind
  pursues an uncertain course;
my apprehensions come and go
  in diffuse clouds;
I fail to see you whole
  or know you true,
    O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

How shall it profit my mind
if it seeks to know
the outside world
but scrutinizes not itself?
How shall I train my mind
to seek alone the truth,
guided by the footprints
of your devotees,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

My mind is a wanton jade:
my wish is father to my thought;
my fluid inclinations
  rule me entire;
I have no living faith
  in your devotees.
Purify me, save me,
    O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

Oh the mind—mine intelligence!
It's the full-grown serpent
  in a charmer's grip,
  or swaying and dancing to his tune,
  his obedient slave:
an unguarded moment, and roused
  by an ungovernable rage,
  it strikes the charmer himself!
May I ever learn to keep my mind—
  lest it kill the body that gave it birth—
  in fullest, safest restraint,
    O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

Wouldst thou the mongrel cleanse
and seat in a palanquin fair?
At sight of a mouse or refuse
its wild desires revive,
it bolts away.
My mind's like an unchained dog;
it's weakly sensitive
to sensual desires;
I cannot meditate on thee
with true constancy.
O cure me my weaknesses,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

My mind's a conceited fool;
it seeks in others room
  vainly to examine,
  proudly to judge;
itself it dares not,
  it cannot apprehend.
How vain, how hopeless is my mind,
    O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

The rope of desire doth hold me in leash
within the ambit of sin;
I lay waste my powers, my time—
and I meditate not on thee.
O raise me up, banish all desire,
and this sense of sin;
unleash me from my bondage;
keep me enraptured at your feet
like the bee near the lotus,
and save me,
O merciful God,
my Lord, Kudala Sangama!

As the green spreads before the brute,
  it bends to bite the grass:
  it cannot help it.
Away then with the giddy green
  of sensual pleasures;
rather feed me with devotion,
  and slake my thirst
  with wisdom pure,
    O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

They that blindly love me,
  they praise me,
  impale me on a golden stake.
Such love hurts me,
  dagger-like pierces me.
It is beyond endurance.
Merciful Lord,
  save me from such love,
  save me,
    O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

There be some that are rich;
they may build temples to you
(or they may not)—
stony, mortal edifices!
I am not rich—poor me!
And yet, be my legs the pillars,
my body the shrine,
my head the golden pinnacle;
thus will I decree
your imperishable home,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

Awake, arise,
  with the first, faint streaks of dawn;
gather ye the hallowed leaves
  and worship God.
A counted number of pulses
  is all our life.
Time is fleeting—
  and ere Death's approach,
    serve the Lord, Kudala Sangama!

Wouldst thou the world,
its jerks and curves,
set right?
To thine own self apply
thy remedy.
Not those who grieve
for others' woes alone,
reach you,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

The supple snake
  glides along and slips
  into the ant-hill;
the zig-zag river's course
  but points to the sea;
and the devotee's ways,
  so crooked seeming,
  just lead to you,
    O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

This our earthly life
  is an ordeal prolonged;
we fail hereafter
  by failing here;
  triumph otherwise
  for ever,
    O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

Dizzy heaven's approaches
are not strewn with roses
but only thorns;
the hard task-master grants no respite
but pounds him,
lashes him,
reduces him to dust!
If the pilgrim's mind yet wavers not
but hymns a Song of Honour,
you'll redeem him and save him,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

When you bathe, friends,
in the flowing stream,
do you lave yourselves of dirt?
—the greed for another's pelf
and the sin of carnal desire?
If my friends but bathe,
not wash out these sins,
this clinging dirt,
in vain has the river flown,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

Thinkst thou to bring
  a heap of leaves
  —and worship God?
Thinkst thou to bathe
  these stony images
  —and worship God?
It's much ado—
  and pleases not my Lord.
Not leaves alone,
  nor baths so many,
  but true devotion
    moves my Lord, Kudala Sangama!

It is the stern discipline of Self
to endure all;
to reveal all one has;
to act ever blameless;
to speak alone the truth.
But 'tis the greatest discipline of all
to surrender free our dearest goods
to the true devotees
of my Lord, Kudala Sangama!

What all I did in lives ere this
I know not, care not.
In this self-same life
I feel the ache in my limbs
as I raise my hands against others;
I find myself accursed
as I hurl on others my curses—
they all come back to me!
The fruits of our endeavours
are won here, even here.
May I then worship you
and gain your grace for ever,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

The devotee walks the razor's edge,—
a perilous path;
like a quick-moving saw
it cuts both ways,—
there's no respite, none!
As safely play with the snake
as toy with devotion,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

What's true wisdom, indeed?
Not learning the Gita by rote
nor chanting the Vedas complete:
it's being more than knowing;
it's great trust in God;
it's an active career of service;
it's courage in the face of death,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

They see the snake's image
that's carved in stone:
they wash it with milk.
They see the live snake emerge,
and they batter it down.
And while the starving devotee
begs for alms in vain,
these self-deceivers offer food
to semblances in stone,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

There are gods, and gods, and gods:
some melt within a tongue of flame;
some are cheap,
and are sold for a song;
some hide underground,
and dangers pass them by.
O save me from these deities false,
thou only one,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

When the crow sees a morsel of food,
it caws aloud and calls its kin
to share the feast.
When the hen sees a heap of corn,
it gathers all its tribe
to share the feast.
Lesser than the crow or hen is he
who vainly calls himself a devotee
but serves not your servants,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

Keep the stone in water—
  it matters not how long—
  the stone will never grow soft.
It's all a lost endeavour.
When the mind is proving wayward,
  what good can seeming worship do—
  though long it be and loud—
    O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

From the sorry mould of an ape's
were a golden statue cast,—
although the metal be gold,
the shape is repulsive still!
From a man inherently vicious
what true devotee can emerge?
Can foul clay at all
a fair shape produce,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

Encase a fruit, if you will,
in a ring of iron;
it ripens and rots none the less;
teach the impure mind, if you will,
devotional lore;
it stagnates none the less,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

Wouldst thou the bubble preserve
within a heavy frame?
It bursts at once
and your folly scorns.
The world's a bubble,
frail is your body,
and life is less than a span.
Trust only the servants of the Lord
to give hope of eternal life,
and trust entire
my Lord, Kudala Sangama!

The spreading branches of the tree obscure
the shadow of the man underneath;
in the blinding radiance of your devotees
mine own devotion is nothing at all.
Why claim that I'm your devotee, too?
It were vain, destroying pride,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

My whole life is one endless shame.
Vain like the wretched dwarf
  that clasps a crown on his head,
  the ugly face that seeks refuge in paint,
  the clumsy amours of the blinded man—
even so vain is my boast
  that I am one of your devotees,
    O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

Be it a jar of milk
at the palm tree's foot,—
yet liquor it's thought to be;
be it a virtuous man
consorting with the wicked,
yet vicious he'll pass to be.
Let me then seek the company
of your devotees true,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

Make an image of dirt
  and throw flowers thereon :
  it smells,
  and stinks none the less;
make a doll of clay
  and wash it again and again :
  it drips with mud still;
teach a worldly man eternal vows,
  his earth-crust falls not,
  palls not him,
    O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

Should the margosa seed
be planted in a sugary bed,
and nourished with honey and milk—
it may not sprout at all;
should it ever grow to a tree,
can it dispel its bitter taste?
A sinful creature can never fashion
into a devotee pure,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

The braggart pushed to the battle-field
of prowess talks no more;
the seeming saint as he catches
a glimpse of a maiden's skirt,
forgets his celibate vows entire.
Their loud affirmations are mere fire
flaring in a dry stubble;
they but dance like the bear,
chatter like the ape,
repulsive, futile, all!
Lead me away from these,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

See the flame flit to and fro
  a little while,
  then die with a blast of wind.
See the multifoliate crowd disperse
  in a fair,
  and leave not a rack behind.
Our life, our riches all,
  are even thus and thus,
    O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

I fear nor creeping snake,
nor consuming fires,
nor the poniard's edge.
I fear only, and shun
the lust for another's wife,
the greed for another's pelf.
Save me from these,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

What men are these, O Lord,
that speak your name and wear your
badge?
But oft their flesh with desire fumes,
they feed on meat,
they drink unreserved;
their senses thrill,
and their lusts prevail.
They're life-long self-deceivers,
no better,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

The black-a-moor may yearn for ever—
he may not white become;
the poor may tire themselves with longing—
they may not rich become;
the novice may chant the lives of the saints—
but himself still unchanged be.
Not passive thought,
but sternest service,
can make me worthy of your grace,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

The house is empty,
the grass has wildly grown,
and dirt and dross is all over the place :
the master is away,
he's not in the house.
The human body is the home of God :
is it not clean and pure ?
does it teem with ill desire ?
is it shot all through with untruth ?
Then is it no fitting place
for my Lord, Kudala Sangama !

When I say I believe,
  when I glory in my faith,
  you're sure to test me,
  and shake myself entire.
My mind will be sorely smitten,
  my goods destroyed,
  my frame made weak.
If undaunted still,
  and firm I prove,—
  such faith rejoices you,
    O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

Your Great Illusion
  envelopes the world;
my fragile mind
  just apprehends you.
If you be strong,
  then I'm stronger still.
Even as a mirror the elephant holds
  in miniature,
  my mind holds you,
    O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

The goad is small—
  the massive elephant
  is yet held in thrall;
tiny is the diamond—
  and still at its touch
  a mountain scattereth;
streaks of knowledge,
  faint pins of light—
  and clouds of darkness,
  they drive away;
the atomic mind,
  sees all, knows all—
  pierces the shell
  of self-forged sloth
  to reach you,
    O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

The crow that's perched on the hilly top
no other eminence needs;
iron itself, with the touch-stone's help,
might noble qualities scorn;
the common tree, that grows by sandal-
wood,
needs no other perfume;
and so a vicious thing like me,
girded by your grace,
might other virtues bar,
care not for them,
want them not—
only trust in you, rest in you,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

You are all my sorrows, Sire,
my manifold joys as well;
you are all the objects of my desire,
aye, my father and mother in one—
and, indeed, there's nothing beyond you,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

Wouldst thou the year's days divide
into kinds, and groups, and grades?
What's this, and that, and this else?
All days must rank the same
in the eyes of the devout;
all days are one and the same
to pray and to serve,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

When you chew the bamboo stick,
your teeth are hurt, but juice there's none;
when you churn a pot of water,
your hands may ache, no butter comes forth;
when you attempt to spin out a mass of sand,
it's all ado, and no inch of rope.
It's like energy frittered away
when you bend your heads before gods
except only
my Lord, Kudala Sangama!

The curd again cannot milk become,
nor butter made from ghee again;
though grown out of the saltish sea,
the pearl cannot brine become.
May your grace purify me into gold,—
then never base I'll be,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

Walking numbs not the leg,
nor seeing the eye,
nor working the hand,
nor singing the tongue,
nor the plaited hair the head,
nor aspirations the mind.
So tirelessly my heart
will worship and serve you,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

Wherever these eyes are cast,
they see only you, my lord!
you are all our eyes,
you are all our arms,
our mouths, our feet as well:
You are all in all,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

Wherever I cast my glances,
I see you there, my Lord;
the pattern of endless space,
the light of the cosmic eye,
and the Universe's living voice—
You are there and all,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

Your grace can stir dry roots
with the freshness of spring;
from your grace can the sterile cow derive
abundant milk;
poison itself can your grace transform
into holy nectar.
Your grace is the source of all good,
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

The joints of my frame are unloosened quite,
the links I can feel no more:
I'm urged towards thee!
I swell with desire to touch thee
and merge with your mind!
I cannot change, nor turn back now;
Vouchsafe me your love
O Lord, Kudala Sangama!

They melt and merge and fuse—
the wax in the fire
and the ice in the stream;
the tears in my eyes
and the flesh itself in the stream of life!
This bliss ineffable is the gift
of my Lord, Kudala Sangama!

RHAPSODIES OF SISTER MAHADEVI

Listen, O mother,
  I love him.
He's the One, the only One;
He knows no birth, no death;
He's uncabinned by caste or clime;
He's boundless, changeless, formless;
He's beautiful beyond compare.
  All others fade away
    and die at last:
    I'll have none of them.
My Lord for e'er shall be
  the one Chennamallikarjuna!

Ye parrots singing
in mirthful ease;
and oh ye swans
frolicking near the lake;
and ye joyous cuckoos
piping full-throated;
and ye proud peacocks
strutting up and down in glee,
over hill and dale—
tell me, O tell me,
ye one and all,
did you ever chance to see,
my lover,
my own Chennamallikarjuna!

I am impatient,
O my Lord,
come soon, come soon.
I've bathed,
I've put on saffron,
and decked myself in gold;
I'm parched with the thirst of love,—
for you and life's love are one;
I gaze up and down the street
eager for your coming;
I abase myself before Cupid,
I cry to the moon in despair:
I cannot bear this,
I cannot:
I shall shame myself before everyone—
it matters not—
for you come not to me,
O my Chennamallikarjuna!

The groves and the trees therein,
the branches and the foliage,
and the creatures gambolling about,
You are there all in all,
You are one and all,
O my Chennamallikarjuna!

O my mind,
it is you, in you:
may it trust and rest in you,
seek and lose and find itself
in only you;
moan and exult by turns,
melt and fuse itself at last
in only you;
may my five senses,
like burning camphor amidst flames,
purify themselves,
and merge in you,
my own Chennamallikarjuna!

I'm no helpless woman;
I utter no futile threats;
I'm nothing daunted—
  I fear you not:
I shall dare hunger and pain;
I shall steal out of withered leaves
    a wholesome meal,
  and on pointed swords
    shall make my bed;
I'm ready for your sake
  to dare the worst,
    to die this instant:
  the readiness is all,
    O my Chennamallikarjuna!